

ANTI-SEMITIC STEREOTYPES

*A Paradigm of Otherness in English Popular
Culture, 1660–1830*



Frank Felsenstein



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ENGLISH POPULAR CULTURE,
1660–1830

FRANK FELSENSTEIN

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ANTI-SEMITIC
STEREOTYPES

JOHNS HOPKINS JEWISH STUDIES

Sander Gilman and Steven T. Katz
Series Editors

FOR CAROLE
WITHOUT WHOM
THIS BOOK
WOULD NOT
HAVE BEEN

ILLUSTRATIONS

1. "Isaac of Norwich." Drawing, 1233. Exchequer of Receipt, Jews' Roll, no. 87 27
2. *The Wandering-Jew Telling Fortunes to English-men.* Woodcut title page, 1640 44
3. William Hogarth, *A Harlot's Progress.* Engraving, 1732. Plate 2 54
4. William Hogarth, *Election.* Engraving, 1757. Plate 2: (a) *Canvassing for Votes*; (b) detail of same 56
5. *Moses Gorden or the Wandering Jew.* Engraving. Birmingham, 1788 63
6. Thomas Rowlandson, *Too Many for a Jew.* Engraving, 1785 71
7. "You must return me Sixpence, Sir!" Lithograph, c. 1830s 76
8. William Heath, *11th Commandment.* Engraving, 1830 77
9. *A Jew Pedlar.* Engraving, c. 1790-1800 81
10. *Mo Isaacs (or) The Jew in Grain.* Engraving, 1824 82
11. James Gillray, *The Prophet of the Hebrews.* Engraving, 1795 97
12. Johann Heinrich Ramberg, *Moses Chusing His Cook.* Engraving, 1788 116
13. *One of the Tribe of Levi Going to Brakefast with a Young Christian.* Mezzotint, 1778 120
14. *The Jew Rabbi Turn'd to a Christian.* Mezzotint, 1772 121
15. Thomas Rowlandson, *Humours of Houndsditch.* Engraving, 1813 129
16. George Cruikshank, *Suitors to the Pig Faced Lady.* (a) Engraving. 1815; (b) detail of same 130
17. Thomas Bonner, *The Conversion of Nathan.* Engraving, 1764 134
18. James Gillray, "Mr. Franco." Engraving, 1800 138
19. Johann Heinrich Ramberg, *Mr. Macklin in Shylock.* Engraving, 1785 172
20. *Roscus in Triumph, or the downfall of Shylock alias Mackbeth.* Engraving, 1773 174

21. *An Infallible Recipe to Make a Wicked Manager of a Theatre.* Engraving, Chester[?], 1750 177
22. *A Prospect of the New Jerusalem.* Engraving, 1753 195
23. *The Circumcised Gentiles, or a Journey to Jerusalem.* Engraving, 1753 199
24. *The Jew Naturalized.* Engraving, 1753 204
25. *The Grand Conference or the Jew Predominant.* Engraving, 1753 208
26. *A Scene of Scenes for the Year 1853.* Engraving, 1753 210
27. *Vox Populi, Vox Dei, or the Jew Act Repealed.* Engraving, 1753 213
28. *Jews receiving Stolen Goods.* Mezzotint, 1777 217
29. *The Loyal Jew—and French Soldier or Beard against Whiskers!!* Engraving, 1803 232
30. George Cruikshank, *The Jew & Morris Bolter begin to understand each other.* Engraving, 1839 240

CHRONOLOGY

- c. 1066 Settlement of Norman Jews in England
- 1144 Reputed martyrdom of William of Norwich (earliest blood libel)
- 1255 Death of Hugh of Lincoln (among the most prominent of many blood libels against the Jews)
- 1290 Banishment of the Jews from England under Edward I
- c. 1589–90 First performance of Christopher Marlowe, *The Jew of Malta*
- 1594 Trial and execution of Roderigo Lopez
- c. 1594–98 First performance of William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*
- 1655 Readmission of the Jews begins under Oliver Cromwell after petition by Menasseh Ben Israel
- 1680 Apostasy of Eve Cohan
- 1697 Number of Jews on London Exchange limited to twelve
- 1701 First performance of George Granville, *The Jew of Venice* (Thomas Doggett as Shylock)
- 1714 John Toland's *Reasons for Naturalizing the Jews* published
- 1732 Trial of William Osborne for publishing anti-Jewish libel
William Hogarth's *A Harlot's Progress* published
- 1741 Charles Macklin's first performance of the part of Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*
- 1753 Jewish Naturalization Act (26 Geo. II, c. 33) passed but repealed (27 Geo. II, c. 1) in the following parliamentary session
- 1757 William Hogarth's *Election* plates published
- 1765 Bishop Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* published

1771	Chelsea murders
1787	Conversion of Lord George Gordon to Judaism
1794	First performance of Richard Cumberland, <i>The Jew</i> Richard Brothers begins his ministry to the Jews
1809	Founding of the London Society for the Promotion of Christianity among the Jews
1814	Edmund Kean's first performance as Shylock
1817	Publication of Maria Edgeworth, <i>Harrington</i>
1819	Publication of Sir Walter Scott, <i>Ivanhoe</i>
1829	Roman Catholic Relief Act (10 Geo. IV, c. 7)
1830	First Jewish Emancipation Bill defeated
1831	Restrictions on Jewish traders in the City of London removed
1833	First Jew called to the bar
1835	First Jewish sheriff of London and Westminster
1836	First Jewish Alderman of the City of London
1837	Moses Montefiore knighted
1837-39	Publication of Charles Dickens's <i>Adventures of Oliver Twist</i>
1841	First Jewish baronet created
1847	First Jew elected to Parliament
1855	First Jewish Lord Mayor of London
1858	Jewish Emancipation adopted

Fuller chronologies of Anglo-Jewish historical events are contained in Albert M. Hyamson, *A History of the Jews in England* (London, 1908), and H. S. Q. Henriques, *The Jews and the English Law* (Oxford, 1908). Old Style Julian Calendar dates (prior to the reform of 1752) have, where necessary, been silently emended in my text to accord with New Style dating.

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

AS A YOUNG SCHOOLBOY, growing up in the nonorthodox environment of an outer London suburb during the early 1950s, I was seriously perplexed when a gentile classmate, with whom I had often played, buttonholed me with the startling accusation that we Jews regularly engaged in acts of ritual sacrifice. I could only deny the charge by lamely responding that I had never been witness to such an occurrence nor indeed until that moment ever heard of its existence. My classmate gave me a quizzical glance expressive of complete disbelief and informed me that it *must* be true as his knowledge of it came with the authority of his parents. A few days later, he again accosted me with a similar allegation, declaring that his father had since related to him how it was well known that the Jews commonly sacrificed young Christian children in their temple, although he had conceded that in recent times they had been constrained to the use of domestic animals. His mother, my fellow pupil added, had as a consequence of this disclosure insisted that from now on we boys no longer visit each other's houses nor even play together. Needless to say, after that he and I were hardly destined to continue as friends!

When I inquired of my own parents to confirm or refute the dreadful aspersion that my erstwhile playmate had leveled against those of our faith, they peremptorily dismissed it and assured me that I should not believe such silly nonsense. Although I fully accepted their word that what I had heard was but a flagrant concoction, I still remained perplexed and slightly hurt. It was only when I was considerably older and maybe a little wiser that I began to understand that the accusation made with such callow impunity was neither more nor less than a still-intact vestige of a much larger myth concerning the Jews that had persisted, perhaps increasingly on the fringes of Christian culture, for many hundreds of years. The continuity of this myth from the late Middle Ages through the "longer" eighteenth century, approximately 1660 to 1830, and the growing challenge to its veracity, pointing by the end of the period to its fragmentation more than its demise, furnishes the subject of this book.

The focus of my research is the existence of three remarkable collections of English books and pamphlets relating to the Jews. These are the Israel Solomons Collection in the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America (New York), at which I was granted a research fellowship during the autumn of 1985, the Mocatta Collection (University College Library, University of London), and the Roth Collection (Brotherton Library, University of Leeds). In addition, extensive use has been made of graphic material in the British Library (Department of Prints and Drawings), the Library of Congress, and the privately owned collection of Mr. Alfred Rubens. The British Library, the Folger Library (Washington), the library of the Shakespeare Institute (Stratford and Birmingham), and the New York Public Library are among other collections that have provided essential—and often unique—material for study. Given their present rarity and diffusion, I have deliberately utilized extensive quotation from the works I have read to provide the staple for much of my discussion. In my employment of visual material, particularly satirical prints, I have in many cases endeavored to untie the narrative elements of the cartoon rather than discussing those more distinctly aesthetic qualities that might intrigue the professional art historian.

The pamphlets, prints, and so on, that I have examined are considerably more valuable as indicators of *English* attitudes toward the Jews than necessarily presenting an accurate or truthful depiction of the Jews themselves. Works of the kind can often tell us far more about the endemic beliefs and prejudices of those who are the *stereotypers* than they can reveal about the *stereotyped*. In a primitive sense, many of the stereotypical attitudes that were accepted as “facts” about the Jews during the eighteenth century prefigure similar forms of prejudice toward minority groups in the twentieth century. Although we would risk implicating ourselves in a reductive trap by assuming too readily that anti-Semitism diminished while approbation of the Jews was augmented during the period under study, it is apparent that their renewed presence in England called into question and sometimes attenuated many biases and assumptions once accepted more or less verbatim by the host population. In this sense, the study of the historical and literary representation of the Jew as “Other” provides an appropriate paradigm for our own age and for present-day research into patterns of ethnic discrimination.

The nine chapters of the book are conceived thematically, although their sequence here is to a large extent determined by chronology. For

readers seeking preliminary signposting, the following is a very general synopsis:

In the opening chapter, "Stereotypes," I review several recent ideas on stereotyping, taken chiefly from theories current in social psychology, and endeavor to place these within the broader domain of cultural studies through referral to the innovative approaches posited by Edward Said, Sander L. Gilman, and others. The chapter is concerned to translate such ideas, particularly that of the Jew as Other, into a coherent methodology for the study of the stereotyping of Jews within the "longer" eighteenth century as a whole.

"Jews and Devils" (chapter 2) is a backward glance, examining the evolution of anti-Semitic stereotyping during the late Middle Ages and Renaissance period when (with the occasional exception of a few secret believers) no Jews lived in England. Despite—or perhaps partly because of—their absence, the rituals and practices of the Jews were frequently viewed in popular taxonomy as diabolically inspired. An earlier version of this chapter has appeared in *Literature and Theology* (March 1990) and I am grateful to the journal's editor, Dr. David Jasper, for permission to expand and reprint it here.

The focus of "Following Readmission" (chapter 3) is on the period from 1655 through the early eighteenth century, when the traditional diabolized stereotype was implicitly challenged by the renewed presence of actual Jews. The chapter examines also the demographics of the Jewish community, the imagined threat that it posed to the status quo in England, the verbal and proverbial employment of the word "Jew," and the perceived distinction between "rich" (Sephardi) and "poor" (Ashkenazi) Jews.

"Wandering Jew, Vagabond Jews" (chapter 4) juxtaposes the imaginary and the real. It examines the iconography of the Wandering Jew and shows how actual Jewish pedlars were interpreted as living proof of God's declared intention that those who were once his chosen people should be granted no respite until they came finally to recognize the "true" Messiah. The chapter also introduces a discussion of the literary representation of the Wandering Jew in the eighteenth century and of the dialectal peculiarities of the language of pedlars.

In "Conversion" (chapter 5), I look selectively at the very large body of pamphlet literature concerned with the endeavors of Christians to proselytize the Jews. The chapter pursues some of the arguments that were put forward by way of persuasion and at the treatment of converted Jews. It also examines the repeated fears of many Christians that the Jews were conniving to convert them. Parts of this chapter were origi-

nally presented as papers, "Conversion and Infanticide" and "Jews and Christian Jews" at annual meetings of the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies (ASECS) in Pittsburgh, Pa., April 1991, and in Charleston, S.C., March 1994.

"Ceremonies" (chapter 6) shows how anti-Semitic discourse in the eighteenth century proposed as witnessed fact a bizarre "alternative" liturgy and barbaric observance that it, quite unashamedly, ascribed to the Jews. In particular, it concentrates on the perverse representation of Jewish dietary laws (Jews as secret lovers of pork), circumcision, and the ritual murder myth.

"'Ev'ry child hates Shylock'" (chapter 7) traces the history of the performance of *The Merchant of Venice* from the time of Shakespeare to the early nineteenth century. It appraises George Granville's adaptation of the play and the revival by Charles Macklin of Shakespeare's play with Shylock as the inveterate diabolized Jew. It shows how outside the drama Shylock became a kind of cipher revealing deeply embedded anti-Semitic sentiments, and the reaction to this from the late eighteenth century. A version of this chapter, "Money and Macklin's Shylock," was presented as a paper at the annual meeting of ASECS in Minneapolis in 1990.

In "The Jew Bill" (chapter 8), I examine the Act of 1753 and the plethora of tracts and satirical cartoons spawned by the ill-fated venture by the Pelham administration to naturalize certain Jews. The chapter reviews the reappearance in many of these pamphlets and prints of traditional anti-Semitic stereotypes and the longer term effect of the repeal of the act. As the bill was specifically intended to aid a small number of affluent Sephardim, this chapter also explores the representation of the Jew as plutocrat.

"Toward Emancipation" (chapter 9) investigates the extent to which the presence in England of actual Jews and awareness of them might have contributed to the presumed evolution of more liberalized attitudes in the early nineteenth century. Taking particular examples from Cobbett and Dickens, it also considers the persistence of forms of anti-Semitic stereotyping into the nineteenth century.

Finally, the Epilogue is an attempt to contextualize. It assesses whether (as has been claimed) attacks against the Jews should be understood by and large as the rhetoric of the age and little different from similar diatribes against other national and religious minorities all too common in English cultural discourse of the eighteenth century.

As well as the institutions already mentioned, my work has been valuably served by the following libraries: Birmingham City Reference

Library; Chetham's Library, Manchester; Avery and Butler Libraries, Columbia University, New York; Leeds City Reference Library; Leeds (Private) Subscription Library; Public Record Office, London; Senate House Library and the Institute of Historical Research, University of London; John Rylands Library, University of Manchester; New York Public Library; Bodleian Library, Oxford; Firestone Library, Princeton University; Jean and Alexander Heard Library, Vanderbilt University, Nashville. I am grateful to the staff at the University of Leeds Audio-Visual Service for their assistance with photography.

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ANTI-SEMITIC STEREOTYPES

CONTENTS

List of Illustrations ix

Chronology xi

Preface and Acknowledgments xiii

Introduction I

1. Stereotypes 10

2. Jews and Devils 27

3. Following Readmission: Evolving Stereotypes 40

4. Wandering Jew, Vagabond Jews 58

5. Conversion 90

6. Ceremonies 123

7. "Ev'ry child hates Shylock" 158

8. The Jew Bill 187

9. Toward Emancipation 215

Epilogue 245

Notes 261

Bibliography 319

Index 339